

SEVEN STEPS TO ATTAINMENT

Issued by the Supreme Council of the
ROSICRUCIAN ORDER, A.M.O.R.C.

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There is an ultimate end of life, from the physical point of view. This is apparent to everyone--to the highly civilized man, to the barbarian, and even to the aborigine. This end of life, this termination of our physical existence is the cessation of those attributes and those functions which we associate with living, or with those things which we say are animate. We, each of us, are moving continually in the direction of this physical end of life, this transition from living. We are moving in this direction through no power of our own, nor is it the result of a volition of ours. The nature of this life force, with which things are animated, and the cause of it, we leave to the research scientist, to the biologist, to the biochemist, and to the physiologist, and the probable reason for our physical existence, we leave to the abstractions of the philosopher.

However, if it be granted that man has will and may make certain choices, what are the fundamental choices of his will? What choice should man make? A fundamental choice cannot include death, for death is inevitable. It comes to all, whether they choose it or not. Furthermore, the fundamental choices of man cannot include life, because if we are able to choose to live we are already living, by virtue of the fact that we can make the choice, and so it amounts to no choice. Therefore, we are really only free to choose how to use our existence here. In other words, having consciousness as we do, of what shall we be conscious?

Now, there are those whose choice consists in striving for health alone. But to make health your principal end or choice is really a negative attainment. It results merely in the removal of distress and suffering. Good health gives more substance to life, provides more longevity, but, after all, that is like reinforcing the walls of a building and continuing to add buttresses and other supports. One does not reinforce the walls of an empty house, or one in which nothing will be placed, or which has no definite purpose. Striving just for health so as to insure longevity is like that. Then, there are those who principally seek to attain wealth. They believe that to be indicative of their choice; however, cupidity or the love of possessions is nothing else but a desire, and desires are an inescapable quality of life itself. Desire is not a choice, it is a compulsion as inseparable from life as moisture is from water.

Of what then should our voluntary attainment in life consist? What should be our fundamental choice? In general, the answer must be to choose complete and perfect happiness. Theologians, mystics, and philosophers, for centuries, have contended that man is a triune being; namely, that he consists of body, mind, and soul. Therefore, the only perfect happiness which there can be, the only happiness which can be complete is that happiness which embraces all three of these aspects of man's nature. There are seven steps to this perfect happiness in life, seven steps by which it is attained. From time immemorial, seven

has been referred to frequently as the necessary number of steps which man must take for attainment in life. Since seven has been principally selected by the ancients, as the number, it must obviously have some mystical significance or importance. For example, Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, relates that the Tower of Babel, built by the ancient Babylonians, had seven tiers up which the votaries ascended to reach the Temple of Enlil, the God of Air, upon the top. The first Egyptian pyramid, having sloping sides and built by Pharaoh Snefru, 2900 B. C., consisted of seven stories. Each was a separate little structure placed upon the other, and each succeeding one was slightly smaller than the one before it, so the whole was terraced and then the sides were filled in to create the slope.

The early Gnostics, who sought salvation through knowledge alone, also venerated the number seven. To them, seven represented the four points of the square added to the three points of the triangle. They symbolized this by drawing the square with the triangle resting upon it, with point upward. The three points of the triangle to them depicted the three natures of man, as body, mind, and soul. The four points of the square represented the fundamental expressions or manifestations of nature--fire, water, earth, and air.

Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher and scientist, founder of the school of mysticism in Cretona, Italy, also held that the heptad, or numeral seven, was worthy of veneration. He further declared it to be the most perfect of all numerals, possibly because he found that in the cyclical phenomena of nature, things recurred often in periods of seven. As applied to man, Pythagoras divided life into ten periods of seven years each. Further, the Rosicrucian mystics of the Middle Ages divided the functioning of will and the kinds of understanding into seven each.

The Substance of Man

The first of these seven steps to the attainment of happiness is the understanding of substance--our substance and the substance of other things. Every man, each of us, is conscious that he is. This self-consciousness is the starting point for all else which we conceive to exist. Things exist to us only because first we exist to ourselves. Things are said to have a place in time and to exist in space, because they revolve about us. We say that a thing is there only because it is not of us, or doesn't seem to be within us. Again, we say that something is past because it is not in our immediate perception, a part of our immediate present consciousness. Take mankind away and you thereby remove proof of all of the things which exist to him, because he is the means by which they have existence. So consciousness, we must admit, is one of the great substances in the universe.

Reality, of all the myriad things of which we are aware, law and form, are mirrored within the depths of consciousness. Yet, consciousness itself is formless. There is no one thing which represents it. There is nothing that we can single out, point out, and say "that is consciousness." Consciousness, in fact, never realizes itself as only being a single substance, as having a specific limited nature. We are

always aware of self in a grosser substance which we call body. In other words, when we are aware of self, we are also aware that self exists in another substance or vehicle. Now, this body, in which consciousness is resident, has an affinity, that is, a relationship to other things. In other words, we find in other things a similarity to our own body, a certain dependence upon common conditions and a certain similar functioning as well. We, each of us, know that most certainly we have not conceived all of the images which are reflected in our consciousness, of which we are aware. Furthermore, we are quite aware that we did not conceive and create our own consciousness, our own self-consciousness. So we must conclude that the human consciousness must be part of a greater substance, of a stream or flow of something of its own kind which transcends it.

We can then say that we have two great parallels existing in the universe. One is matter or being; and the other is consciousness. We must ask ourselves, can one exist without the other? Can there be consciousness without matter in the universe, or can there be matter without consciousness? And did one originate the other? Has matter come out of consciousness, or has consciousness come out of matter? Or have they both had a common creator or source? If so, what is it like? It is apparent to us that the primary being, the primary source, if you will, must be more than those energies or those forces of which matter consists. It must be, for example, more than merely electricity, magnetism, and light. We have said that it is only through consciousness that such things have existence. Something without a mind to realize it, whether it is a human mind or otherwise, just couldn't be. Furthermore, since consciousness is no one thing in itself, consciousness must have something to mirror, something which it can reflect or consciousness is not. Consequently, we may reason that the primary source of all is neither merely consciousness, nor could it be just those forces and energies which we associate with matter and material things. It is, in fact, the unity of both. For every state of being, or for that which has motion, there must be a state of knowing, a state of consciousness.

That which has being, and which also knows, is mind. Therefore, the first substance, from which all things spring, is absolute mind. If that is so, we mortals, therefore, cannot rightly conceive God as being limited or constricted to any form. God could not be of a form made of a material nature alone. Furthermore, God is not conscious of Himself in any particular form, because His consciousness corresponds to no one form. From this conclusion, we cannot rightly conceive that matter is entirely nonspiritual, that it is devoid of all spiritual essence. We cannot believe, as so many theologians have expounded in the past, that matter is base and corrupt, and that it should be despised or deprecated, that matter has fallen away from a higher state. We must hold that for every divine expression as matter in the universe, there is a corresponding divine consciousness of it--an idea for each form. Therefore, God, as mind, as a primary substance exists in all things that we experience. God is in that which is the grossest and most material of all things, as well as in that which is said to be spiritual consciousness.

How Free Are Men?

The second step to this attainment in life, this perfect and complete happiness, is liberation. Liberation concerns the problem of freedom. Because we choose each moment of the day, because we select this and we select that, are we actually free? Is it not quite possible that in making our numerous choices, we are being subtly influenced by conditions or things of which we are not aware? An absolute freedom in nature would be the greatest disaster which we could imagine. It would mean chaos. The order which we perceive in nature is dependent on its own necessity. Things cannot escape their order. Everything is compelled to conform to its changes, to its motion, of which it is a part. As we look about us, things in nature seem to deviate. They seem to be at great variance with each other. There are things which seem so far apart in their function and form that it is almost impossible, superficially, to imagine any connection between them, and, yet, at their bottom all things are equal, because everything in nature conforms to certain basic, common laws. Is it not reasonable that things which must be equal to each other in essence are therefore not free? One mystic has said that liberty and equality contradict each other, and yet men are constantly prating about the liberty and equality which they are simultaneously seeking. A complete freedom would, in fact, create inequality, for that which is free will not obviously be restrained by any standards. It will not be compelled to be equal to any other thing. Conversely, a true equality, where things are actually equal to each other, does not permit of anything such as liberty. A true equality would not permit anything to deviate from that which is equal.

The question often arises, where men think separately or collectively, was nature determined as it is? In other words, was it predetermined? Was everything conceived as we know and experience it? If all was predetermined in advance, then obviously nothing is free in nature, for nothing can escape that which it is and which it was determined to be. There are those who do not believe that all things were determined in advance. They prefer to conceive that the Cosmic had no beginning and everything that is was and still remains of God. From this point of view also, there could be no freedom in nature, because this really is advancing the theory of necessity. All things at their bottom are of God; therefore, by necessity, they must follow that order of God; consequently, they cannot deviate from it and therefore they are not free.

Much, however, is made of man's volition, his self-determination--the fact that man can say aye of some things, and nay about others, and that he does so at all times. But we say that man also, like the other things in nature, cannot escape making these choices. These choices are but the very necessity of his own being, and do not represent him to be of free will. We either conform to the positive aspect of our nature and thereby are healthier and more harmonious, and possibly live longer, or we choose the negative and do not conform to our nature, and thus we experience not only suffering but an untimely death.

Man is continually acted upon by his emotions, by his instincts, by psychic urges and by the forces and powers of the physical world. Man cannot escape these urges. He cannot put himself apart from them, and, therefore, he is compelled to have preferences as he reacts to these urges. These preferences are kinds of responses which he has from these influences of his being. These preferences are choices and the choices are an integral part of our nature, just as eating, breathing, and drinking are a necessary part of our physical nature. We, each of us, actually choose what pleases our natures. We cannot escape doing so. Therefore, the will is not free. Though we must choose, and are compelled to by the necessity of our own natures, there are preferred choices which we can and should make. We should always choose according to the best quality of our nature, in accordance with the better part of ourselves. Such choice approaches the nature of God. The nearer we are to our whole self, the integrated nature of our being, the closer we are to the Absolute, to God.

The third step to this attainment in life, the perfect happiness, is self-discipline. In his functioning, man has three parts to his being. The first, as we have said, is soul. It is the highest of these three parts, because it is the more complex; that is, it is the most all-embracing. It contains more of the essence of all things, and it is the most unlimited. The second part of man's being is the mind, or the rational, the conscious part. And the third part is that corporeal substance, the body, the grosser Divine manifestation.

In man these three parts have a ratio or an order of one, two, and three. At all times the direction, the command must come from the soul as number One, to the mind as number Two, and finally to the body as number Three. There are certain desires which arise at times in life, which cause us to disturb and disrupt this ratio, and the disruption results in suffering and just the opposite of the happiness which we should attain.

Gautama Buddha, centuries before Christ, was the first to work out a practical system of self-discipline. In fact, Buddha was the first to give to the world a system of what may be termed practical psychology. The essence of this system is expressed in the four great truths of Buddhism. To summarize these truths, all existence provides some kind of suffering and all of the suffering which we experience is caused by insatiable desires, says Buddha, desires which cannot ever be completely satisfied or quieted. Suffering will cease only when we learn to suppress these insatiable desires; in other words, when we have learned to keep the elements of our triune nature obedient to their relationship of one, two, and three.

The fourth step toward this attainment, this fundamental choice which we should make in life, is morality. Of all of the steps which we must take, this one is perhaps the most obscure. The step of morality concerns the problem of the reality of good and evil. Is good real? And is there a real evil? Has there been established a Divine standard, a fixed and definite good, like a Divine dogma or creed which all men should and must recognize, and has it as much reality as ourselves? If there has, then men would be either just obliged to accept that one good of a Divine nature, or reject it entirely. But the fact

remains, and human experience confirms it, that men are continually striving for divergent goods. One group of men is striving for what they hold to be good, and other groups of men are striving just as sincerely for goods which conflict with the former. If men in their hearts want good, why must they be misled by its content? Why must they be going in different directions? It doesn't seem that a compassionate Divine Intelligence or God would so intentionally confuse men who sought good. But if the good has been divinely established, if it is a fixed, definite good, and if God is the creator of all things, then from whence comes evil? What is its source? So, if there is a positive good and God is the creator of it and all else, obviously then, evil cannot have any positive content; evil cannot be real; evil can be only a negative state, the absence of good.

Let us presume that good has a definite existence, that there is a fixed, Divine standard. The question arises, then, why should men aspire to that good? Frankly, why should men be good? Contrary to opinion, no men are truly unselfish--even those who do great works of charity; those who are benevolent; or those who serve others than themselves are doing so because it brings satisfaction to their extended self-consciousness. There are those whose consciousness of self has so extended that self includes many other people and things besides their immediate being. It brings them satisfaction, therefore, to do for those things or those persons which they have included as a part of themselves. If men are to seek good, therefore, the good must satisfy some element of their nature, of their self, or they will not aspire to it.

Spiritual good, as held out to us by theology, by religion, promises a reward of salvation and of immortality. However, this spiritual good can only be appreciated by those who desire immortality. Obviously, if one does not desire immortality, he will not then seek the spiritual good which offers it as a reward. Men are not equal. Each has some part of his nature dominating at all times. Some men are more physical; some men are more intellectual; and some men are more spiritual. Each experiences a good according to which nature dominates. Each nature has its own goods, its own rewards, and we must first realize one and then the other. That is how we climb upward in self. The greatest rewards of the body are health and vigor. These are the goods which come from obeying the physical part of ourselves. There are also goods, or rewards, of an intellectual nature. The exercise of our reason, the developing of the various faculties of our minds bring their good; as, for example, self-respect, confidence, and poise. Until we experience the spiritual self, until we permit the soul, the highest part of our nature, to dominate, we cannot know that its goods are best, and we cannot be compelled to seek them. Thus we must climb from one good to another good.

Knowledge vs. Understanding

This brings us to the next step in attainment, and that is understanding. Without understanding, man is nothing more than a wanderer in the dark. Meister Eckhart, the great German, medieval mystic, said that understanding means seeing things clearly and in their proper light. Now, we know that perception is to perceive, to see, to hear,

and to feel things. On the other hand, apperception goes beyond just mere perception. It is to give meaning to those things which finally arise in our minds, to give them proper classification and comprehension. The receptor faculties which we have--that is, sight, touch, smell, etc.--are like the esophagus and the mouth; they are but intake channels for the reception of numerous impressions from without. Conversely, the reason and the various faculties of mind function not unlike the stomach, in that they digest what has been received.

No knowledge is so useless as that which has not been digested; namely, as that for which there is no corresponding personal idea or conclusion which we have arrived at. Our minds are cluttered with terms, with phrases which we have inherited or which we have heard over the radio or read in newspapers. They are merely words to most of us, which have no use to our understanding, because they are not words which we have adapted or fitted to original ideas of our own. We may say that knowledge is that of which we are conscious. Understanding, on the other hand, is the nature and purpose of that which we have come to know. Wisdom is acquiring experience in the application of understanding. Wisdom is knowing when and how to use that which we understand. Every minute of our conscious existence brings us knowledge, the realization of something. However, it is only meditation and cogitation upon that which we know which brings us understanding. Also it is only the indulgence of the use of understanding which brings us wisdom. In understanding, it is often said, there is power. It is because in the understanding mind the ideas are properly arranged; they have been properly labelled, and classified. They can be used like mechanical parts to repair, to rebuild, or to meet the demands of emergencies.

The sixth step to attainment is application. Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher, made a very effective statement, in reference to application in life. He said that figs are considered fairer and riper when they have begun to shrink. He also said that grapes are thought best when they have grown to such proportions and weight that they bend the vine. So, too, the beauty and ripeness of old age is to be found in the maximum development and application of the powers of mind and the attributes of soul. Death can never surprise the individual who has used his powers fully and intelligently. He cannot be like the actor upon whom the curtain descends before he has finished his play, because one who has used his powers fully is ever prepared for the eventuality of death. Such a person who has lived fully has no regrets. There is nothing to smart his consciousness when death comes. The exertion of mind and the exertion of body, and the extensive employment of consciousness admittedly is fatiguing; yet, one who avoids exertion because it is fatiguing, never comes to experience the intense stimulation which follows rest and rejuvenation. The joy of rejuvenation, the consciousness of renewed power and strength comes only to those who have first exerted themselves.

Life is to live. Let us not deceive ourselves. The whole purport and purpose of life is in its utilization. It has no other value, except as a medium by which something can be accomplished. To restrain our natural functions, to harbor them, or attempt to negate them is a

restriction of life. It is in opposition to the very nature of life. Each of our natures (and we have said the natures of man are triune--that is, three in number), is productive of some good. That being so, then the greatest evil, the most diabolical sin which man can commit is to avoid exerting those powers of his nature with which he has been endowed. If it is conceded that one must sleep and one must eat for the maintenance of health, then also one must think, one must reason and mentally conceive daily. If we do not, we revert to the status of the lower animals. Man is distinguished from the lower living things only by the use of all his powers. There are other living things which can walk and can talk, and can mimic many of our objective activities, but we possess powers of our triune nature, which either they do not possess or which they are not capable of using; and if we do not use them, then we have depreciated ourselves, we have wilfully submitted ourselves to degradation.

The Motion of Mind

The seventh and the last step to the attainment of perfect and complete happiness, which should be our principal choice in life, is aspiration. It is an observable phenomenon in nature that things are constantly changing. The seasons have their changes and there are various other things the qualities of which we can perceive are going through a transition. This change is an internal, as well as an external motion of things. It is not just the change of movement in space, ~~but a change within the essence of things.~~ This principle of change or motion was known long before the ancient Greeks taught it. It was known and understood long before it was expounded in the philosophy of Heraclitus. It was privately taught in the ancient mystery schools of Egypt, particularly in the secret school of ancient Memphis, the City of the White Wall, as it was once called. This doctrine of motion and change was symbolized in this mystery school by a musical instrument known as the sistrum. This instrument was Y shaped in formation. Horizontally placed across the open end of the Y were seven rods. They were affixed loosely to the Y-like handle, so that they could be shaken like a rattle. The priests and the hierophants in these mystery school temples shook this sistrum during certain rituals and ceremonies, to emphasize the Cosmic or Universal motion which they proclaimed, even at that early date, as the cause of all being, of all form.

Since there is unity in the universe, we know from observation that things evolve out of each other, or are evolved and generated out of certain common sources. Man's body, for example, we know is due to the evolution and motion of a combination of two factors--matter and Vital Life Force. But what shall we say is the movement, the motion, the change that comes from man, man the complex being, man the body, the mind, and the soul? What is its product? Certainly mind and the spiritual quality must be productive of something. We can say that man is only fully consistent with the Cosmic law of motion when he aspires, when he has conceived an ideal toward which he can spiral upward, when he seeks to transcend his own environment and the world as he knows it. One who cannot, or who will not, in some small degree, visualize improvements in the welfare of mankind, that will bring understanding,

happiness, or greater power to his family or his immediate society, is really inert as a human. He is at rest, and consequently he is opposed to the Cosmic law of motion. Aspiration exercises or draws upon the special functions of man's mind. It compels use of one's intuitive faculties. It stimulates the imagination. It is aspiration which keeps man's mind lofty. It helps it to transcend the ordinary. It keeps mind the rightful master of the body.

In conclusion, it may be said that happiness, being not a thing but rather a state, is attained by the unity of the foregoing steps; namely, happiness is an aura which emanates from the combining of the understanding of substance, liberation, self-discipline, morality, understanding, application, and aspiration.

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